



UNITED STATES ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY
REGION 10
1200 Sixth Avenue
Seattle, WA 98101

JUL 12 1999

Reply To
Attn Of: RA-140

Steve Allred
Director
Idaho Department of Health & Welfare
Division of Environmental Quality
1410 N. Hilton
Boise, Idaho 83706-1255

Dear Mr. Allred:

The purpose of this letter is to update you on the progress of discussions with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Bureau of Reclamation, and Bonneville Power Administration concerning necessary water quality improvements on the mainstem Columbia-Snake system. On April 6, 1999, a meeting among federal agencies and states was held at the Bonneville Power Administration, and a commitment was made to provide you with a progress report.

As background, you may recall that the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) was approached in 1995 by some Columbia River tribes asking EPA to help resolve some of the water quality issues on the Columbia and Snake River mainstem. The tribes were primarily concerned that dams along the Columbia-Snake system have contributed to temperature and dissolved gas problems. Oregon, Washington, and Idaho have expressed similar concerns to EPA. Since 1996, there have been a series of letters and meetings among parties seeking resolution. In late 1998, the National Marine Fisheries Service decided to broaden the upcoming 1999 decision (a result of the 1995/1998 Biological Opinion on Snake River chinook) on the configuration of the Federal Columbia River Power System to include a multi species, basin wide approach working through a Federal Caucus. The Federal Caucus is made up of senior representatives of the agencies involved in the Columbia Basin. EPA and other agencies saw this Federal Caucus as an opportunity to resolve water quality issues concurrent with salmon issues if water quality measures and schedules were included in the upcoming 1999 decision.

The Federal Caucus formed a Clean Water Act committee chaired by EPA. A number of recommendations were formulated by the Committee and presented to the regional Federal Caucus. A progress report was then made to the Federal Executives on May 5 and June 3. As a result of the June 3 meeting, the agencies generally endorsed the CWA committee moving forward to develop a decision process. The process will ensure progress toward beneficial uses and water quality criteria, including analysis of solutions, costs, and benefits of water quality measures. A final recommendation will be presented at the upcoming July meeting of the Federal Executives. Clearly, any CWA solutions must involve the states and tribes. I will keep you informed about our progress and ensure that there is opportunity for input and participation.

Sincerely,



Chuck Clarke
Regional Administrator

cc: Will Stelle, NMFS
Col. Eric Mogren, USCOE
Judi Johansen, BPA
Steve Clark, USBR